

Trout Hatchery Production for Angling Opportunity

Because California populations of native and wild fish species cannot withstand continued pressure within the state from angling, habitat depletion and other factors, stocking of hatchery trout has long been practiced to provide angling opportunity.

Public and legislative interests have created mandates for hatchery production and stocking. The current target level of annual production and stocking of trout is just over five million pounds, as determined by funding through the Hatchery and Inland Fisheries Fund. The fund is a dedicated account derived from license sales. Because of economic and legal mandates, and the increased cost of trout production, the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) has been unable to meet the goal.

Trout stocking must meet certain legal mandates. For instance, as part of cooperation with federal agencies involved in steelhead conservation, certain waters now require stocking of sterile (triploid) rainbow trout above some dams upstream of steelhead waters so that stocked trout do not compete with native steelhead for habitat or food, or interbreed with native fish, causing genetic issues. Presently, DFG hatcheries do not have triploid fish available and cannot meet required stocking levels. DFG is increasing triploid production, but this year sufficient catchable triploids will not meet stocking demands and some waters will not receive fish.

DFG has utilized stocking of trout as the most practical and desirable way of providing angling opportunity statewide for more than 100 years. The facilities are in need of maintenance and in some cases complete renovation or replacement. Compliance with federal and state environmental laws, which did not exist when the facilities were designed and constructed, makes these changes costly and time-consuming. This paradox of not being able to spend funds on maintenance and renovation because it would preclude meeting production goals will at some point become untenable when facilities fail.

In addition to increasing triploid production for future years, DFG is developing greater capability to successfully produce and stock heritage (native) trout species. Currently, four native species are being produced in DFG hatcheries. Kern River Hatchery is being modified with a water delivery back up system and other infrastructure upgrades for production of the native Kern River rainbow trout. Establishment of a broodstock is expected by fall of 2011. Five heritage species should be in production by January 1, 2012, with 25 percent of overall production to be comprised of heritage species. The feasibility of rearing Lahontan cutthroat trout for the Lake Tahoe basin restoration and regional recreational angling at Moccasin Creek Hatchery is being considered to further meet this goal.